# Heart TO Art!

## THE RAJENDRA-RAFI RISHTA!

As far as Rajendra Kumar was concerned, Mohammed Rafi was the medium through which he bared his soul to the world and also crooned to his on-screen beloved. Over a period of almost 25 years, the jubilee star must have vocalized over 80 hits, and Mohammed Rafi, that singer incomparable, cornered a whopping 75 per cent plus of them. He sang under the baton of composers as varied as Shanker-Jaikishan, Naushad, Ravi, Vasant Desai, S. D. Burman, Kalyanji-Anandji and Laxmikant-Pyarelal, to name a few.

Admittedly, the late Mohammed Rafi was also associated as the prime **awaaz** of a dozen heroes and even a few comedians. But did the Rafi-Rajendra **rishta** stand out?

You bet it did!

Gentle and genteel. That was the essence of the Jubilee Kumar's star image. His USP? That instant appeal of a perfect gentlemanly lover, who often faced earthquakes in his romantic terrain. When happy, he would be energetic, complete with flailing arms and intoxicatingly naughty looks. When miserable, he would retain his sobriety and suffer inwardly, those passionate eyes filled with indefinable and suppressed sorrows.

He reflected the fast changing mores of Hindi cinema at its turning point, from the greater realism of the '50s to the escapism of the '60s. Rajendra Kumar emerged as a major force at the time when Hindi cinema was fast divorcing itself from the traumatic idealism and bitter frustrations spawned by Partition and the ground realities of neo-Independence. The mood was escapist and the audience

was in no mood to watch their real-life blues being mirrored in films. Cinema was seen as the great escape. Films as well as their music gradually became fluffier, less staid and more glossy.

Music directors began to look to the West, even while retaining Indian melody as their base. They began to make delicious experiments with the limitless range and flexibility of Rafi's voice. At one end remained the Rafi of Dilip Kumar, Guru Dutt and Bharat Bhushan. But at the other extreme lay the Rafi of Shammi Kapoor.

And Rajendra Kumar became the centrepoint, at the equidistant position in this vocal Rafi pendulum. He had the handsome, trendy look of the '60s, yet had his inspirational roots in the Dilip Kumar-esque persona. Thus he combined the best of both worlds and music directors found it easy to be inspired by his screen image, because they could judiciously blend the best of the old and the new.

Even a diehard traditionalist like Naushad had to tread a middle path for this star. The brilliant score of **Mere Mehboob** may be rooted in **raags**, but '**Ae husn zara jaag**', '**Yaad mein teri jaag jaag ke hum**' and '**Mere mehboob tujhe meri muhabbat ki kasam**', were remarkably fresh for someone with Naushad's classical approach. When later, Naushad retreated into an older mode with **Palki**, the results were nowhere as good and when he went the whole hog towards modern populism in Rajendra Kumar's home production **Ganwaar**, the maestro was decidedly uncomfortable.

But probably the only Rafi-Rajendra collaboration to have a really old-world feel was Vasant Desai's **Goonj Uthi Shehnai**, probably the first Rafi-Rajendra team-up of any consequence. Desai was too classical a composer to turn over a modern leaf and he designed quintessential but perennial '50s numbers like, '**Jeevan mein piya tera saath rahe**' and the superb, '**Keh do koi na kare yahan pyar**', for the hero.

Ravi, then on a high, pitched in with a few delights like, '**Tumhein paake humne jahan paa liya hai**' (**Gehra Daag**) and '**Jabse tumhein dekha hai**' (**Gharana**). But if Rafi became soul to Rajendra Kumar's body, it was largely because of music directors Shanker-Jaikishan, who decisively ruled in the first decade of Rajendra Kumar's stardom.

1 – *With Sadhana in Aap Aaye Bahaar Aayee.* 2 – *Aas Ka Panchhi.* 3 – *With Nazima in Anjana.* 4 – *With Raj Kapoor and Vyjayanthimala in Sangam.* 5 – *With Sadhana in Arzoo.*

The cascade of hits S-J gave for Rajendra Kumar, began with **Aas Ka Panchhi** ('60) in which they had Mukesh and Subir Sen as his playback voice, along with Rafi. Never again after this film did they even venture to sideline Rafi for Mr. Silver Jubilee. No one came in to share the spoils either. But for Mahendra Kapoor in a **Sangam** song it was Rafi all the stunningly **sureela** way right up to their last, rather inconsequential film together in 1972, **Aan Baan**. And S-J established a Rajendra Kumar-Rafi leitmotif, not only all on their own but also set the pattern for Laxmikant-Pyarelal and Kalyanji-Anandji with Kumar when their own magic began to wane in the early '70s. But in that one terrific decade, S-J unleashed gem after priceless gem and the legion of memorable songs included, '**Tum kamsin ho**' and '**O sanam tere ho gaye hum**' (**Aayee Milan Ki Bela**), '**Chhed mere hamrahi**' and '**Woh din yaad karo**' (**Hamrahi**), '**Dil ek mandir hai**' and '**Yaad na jaaye beete dinon ki**' (**Dil Ek Mandir**),